MEMOIRS

OF THE

LIVES

OF

BENJAMIN LAY

AND

RALPH SANDIFORD;

TWO OF THE EARLIEST PUBLIC ADVOCATES

FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF

THE ENSLAVED AFRICANS.

BY ROBERTS VAUX.

"Pascitur in vivis livor, post fata quiescit,
"Tunc suus, ex merito, quemque tuetur honor."

PHILADELPHIA:
PUBLISHED BY SOLOMON W. CONRAD,
No. 87, High-street.
1815.
W. Brown, Printer.

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Benjamin Lay.

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District of Pennsylvania, to wit:

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the eighth day of November, in the fortieth year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1815, Solomon W. Conrad, of the said District, hath deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

"Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford; "two of the earliest public advocates for the emancipation "of the enslaved Africans. By Roberts Vaux.

"Pascitur in vivis livor, post fata quiescit,
"Tunc suus, ex merito, quemque tuetur honor."

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned." And also to the act entitled, 'An act supplementary to an act, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned,' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

D. CALDWELL,
Clerk of the District of Pennsylvania.

TO

CASPAR WISTAR, M. D.

PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,

PRESIDENT OF THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, &c.— AND OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, &c. &c.

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS GRATEFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY

INSCRIBED,

BY HIS AFFECTIONATE NEPHEW,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE design of this Introduction is not to make the customary apologies of authorship, nor to furnish in justification of this publication, a variety of ingenious reasons, which may have had no influence with the writer.

His sole object, and the utmost extent of his views has been, to furnish whatever his feeble efforts could contribute toward rescuing from unmerited forgetfulness, the names and services of BENJAMIN LAY and RALPH SANDIFORD, both of whom, in his opinion, deserve

to be held in honourable estimation, so long as it is admitted that memory is performing her noblest office when aiding the obligations of gratitude and justice.

The subsequent memoirs will not introduce the reader to the knowledge of men, who have distinguished themselves as warriors in the battle which is "*with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood,*"—who have attained a rank among the luminaries of science, or have been elevated to notice by a splendid career of senatorial greatness; features in the human character which generally excite the respect of nations, awaken the admiration, and beget the

applause of mankind—and secure to such as appear in those higher spheres of action, the certainty of biographical honour. But with those who, with the author, believe in the truth of St. Pierre's assertion, "*that the man who can produce two blades of grass, where only one grew before, is a greater benefactor to mankind than Cæsar or Alexander,*"—the individuals whose services it is his purpose now to delineate and record, have the fairest claims to the respect of the human race.

Among the events which occasionally appear in the history of nations, to dignify and adorn their character, and shed over them a ray of genuine

greatness and glory, the abolition of the African slave trade must be admitted to hold a conspicuous place. It was one of the purest offerings ever borne by lawgivers to the altar of justice—the most acceptable tribute which legislative power could pay at the shrine of mercy. Whilst, however, it is customary to admire the wisdom, and applaud the virtue of those governments which have wiped such pollution from their name, it should equally be a pleasure and a duty, to recognize the labours of individuals in that noble cause of reformation and benevolence. It would be difficult to calculate precisely how extensive and availing the efforts of two men might be, in correcting

the opinions of a large community, especially if their exertions should be so much in opposition to the interests, the habits, and sentiments of a people, as to excite towards them the spirit of intolerance and persecution. This remark is certainly applicable to the history of Lay and Sandiford, who were among the first of the very few in any country that had just conceptions of the rights of the enslaved Africans, and sufficient firmness to avow their opinions concerning the cruelty which was triumphantly exercised over that oppressed race of men.

At the period when they went forth distributing their essays, proclaiming

the iniquity inseparable from the trade in human flesh, and shewing the inconsistency which marked the conduct of Christians, who held their fellow creatures in bondage, the opposition to their views and wishes was so general and so intense, that it is believed from that cause the intellect of those remarkable men became partially affected. But who will question that they were instrumental (at a great sacrifice indeed) in laying the foundation of the change of opinion, which afterward became universal in this commonwealth, and spread its benign influence through neighbouring states, and to remote nations?

Of those, therefore, for whom they did so much, in order to persuade them to be just to themselves, and to their afflicted fellow men, it is fair to enquire—have you repaid the measure of justice due to your benefactors?—Candour must reply in the negative. No memorial invites the eye to that "*clod of the valley*," which mingles with their mortal relics—no volume records the story of their eccentric and devoted lives. The place of their residence—the nature of their occupations—the habitations where their earthly pilgrimage was closed, have been involved in doubt and uncertainty—and now indistinctly linger upon the recollection of most of the few re-

maining individuals,* who were in the morning of life, when old age and disease terminated their existence.

Notwithstanding the disadvantages which attended the collection of materials for their biography, at this remote period from the time in which they lived, and the consequent paucity of matter which could be procured for

* In searching for information respecting Lay and Sandiford, visits were made to most of the oldest inhabitants in the neighbourhoods where they had lived. The combined ages of ten of those persons amounts to *eight hundred and twenty-one years*, and it is remarkable, that all these ancient people appeared to enjoy unusual health and strength; and in most instances their faculties were unimpaired. On enquiring, several of them said, they had observed through life great temperance in drinking.

the purpose; these causes have not operated to discourage the publication of the fragments which were gathered.

The result, such as it is, is now submitted to the public, as a sincere tribute to the memory of those worthy men,—an effort, the best which it was in the power of the author to make, to perpetuate the recollection of their virtues.

MEMOIRS

OF

BENJAMIN LAY.

MEMOIRS

OF

BENJAMIN LAY, &c.

BENJAMIN LAY was born at Colchester, in the County of Essex, Great Britain, Anno Domini 1677. His parents, who were members of the Society of Friends, carefully instructed him in the religious principles which they professed, but their pecuniary resources did not enable them to bestow upon their son, more than the rudiments of learning, as taught in the lower order of English schools.

At an early period of his youth, he was placed an apprentice with a glove-maker, in

whose service he continued for some time. Before, however, he had attained his nineteenth year, he abandoned this employment, and went to reside on a farm in the tenure of his brother. In this situation he remained until the independence which the age of manhood confers, permitted him to gratify the leading inclination of his mind, which withdrew him from the interesting and innocent employments of agriculture, to encounter the hardships and perils of the life of a sailor.

Whilst thus employed, he visited various sections of the globe. In a memorandum extant, he relates, that he served eighteen months on board a ship of four hundred tons burthen, in a voyage to Scanderoon, and it is probable that during the stay of the vessel at that port, he made an excursion to the interior of Syria; for he often related, among other incidents connected with his ocean-wandering, that he had visited the memorable spot, where the Saviour of the World conversed with the woman of Samaria, and had refreshed himself by a draft of water

from *Jacob's well.** His maritime employment terminated in 1710, when he was married to one of his countrywomen, and settled in the town of his nativity. But little is known concerning him during several years of this part of his life, excepting that he appears to have taken an interest in some of the public topics and controversies, by which the close of the seventeenth, and commencement of the eighteenth centuries, were distinguished. He presented, in person, to George the First, and Second, a copy of *John Milton's* pamphlet, entitled "*Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove hirelings out of the Church*;" and on the occasion of the last of these interviews, he was admitted to a private audience of the royal

* Vide John, chap. iv. 5, &c. The interesting interview with the woman of Samaria, probably took place on the same spot, which is thus noticed by Chateaubriand—"A little farther on (says that eloquent author) we alighted at the *fountain where Christ* was accustomed to rest with his apostles, as he returned from Jericho."–Vide *Travels in Greece, Palestine, &c.* in 1806-7, page 289. Philadelphia Edition.

family. To what extent, and in what manner, he participated in the contests of the times, cannot now be accurately ascertained. It is fair to presume, however, that he exceeded the bounds which limited his brethren in religious community; for in the year 1717 they were induced to disunite him from membership among them, and as no charge of immoral conduct was ever preferred against him, this measure is probably to be attributed to the part which he took in the controversies just mentioned.

As he approaches nearer to us by the lapse of time, traits of his character are developed, which establish the belief that he was one of those extraordinary men, whose career through life excited observation and alarm. If the comparison be admissible, he appeared rather like the comet, which threatens, in its irregular course, the destruction of the worlds near which it passes, than as one of those tranquil orbs which hold their accustomed place, and dispense their light, in the harmonious order of heaven.

In 1718, at the age of forty-one years, he removed from his native land to the island of Barbadoes, and there established himself in mercantile business. Here he is exhibited in a new and interesting field of action, in which he appears to have taken a bold and decided part. At this period, the African slave trade was carried on, if possible, with more intense cruelty, than at any previous or subsequent stage of its uniformly iniquitous history. The treatment to which the unhappy victims of avarice were subjected in the service of their masters, on the plantations of the West Indian islands, furnished a melancholy proof of the application of human ingenuity exerted in the contrivance of the most barbarous punishments,—as well as the absence of all compassion, from the hearts of those whose mandate directed, and whose power inflicted them. Thus a witness of scenes which were calculated to excite the keenest sensibility, and awaken the tenderest sympathy of his nature, Benjamin Lay became singularly enlightened, in relation to the injustice and oppression exer-

cised toward the people of Africa. From that moment, every faculty of his mind was exerted, to render odious, not only in the opinion of the community in which he lived, but among mankind universally, a traffic which begot so much crime—entailed so much misery—and threatened such awful retribution from the Omnipotent and regardful Parent of the whole human family.

"Justum, et tenacem propositi virum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida." HORACE.

We now find this philanthropic advocate of the oppressed, fearlessly engaged in public and private admonition with all who were in any degree implicated in the crime of enslaving their species; and whilst he zealously pleaded with the oppressor for the extension of clemency, he was equally conspicuous for the practical benevolence which he manifested toward the subjects of his compassion. Whenever he met the slaves of the island, he noticed them with kindness and

commiseration. They soon became generally acquainted with his views and exertions in their favour, and as an evidence of gratitude to their benefactor, they came from the neighbouring farms on the sabbath day and assembled around his house in the town, to the number of many hundreds; and he thus had an opportunity of conveying to them suitable advice, and also of furnishing them gratuitously with simple and wholesome food, as liberally as his restricted pecuniary resources would allow. In this practice he continued, until popular clamour was raised against him, and he was denied even the melancholy satisfaction of shewing his tenderness for those, whose sufferings, at most, he could only mitigate. In proportion to the steadiness and determination of his testimony against negro bondage, was the hostility of those who were enriched by its existence. Their opposition to his truly christian principles at length became so violent, that after having endured the conflict for several years, and perceiving no prospect of effecting any change in the conduct of the slave-holders, he resolved to

seek an asylum in another country. This resolution, when communicated to his wife, she entirely approved. Her mind was deeply affected with the subject of slavery, and she said on that occasion, "*that she wished to leave Barbadoes, lest by remaining there she might be leavened into the nature of the inhabitants, which was pride and oppression.*" After having resided thirteen years in Barbadoes, he came to Philadelphia in 1731.

Having followed him to the shores of our own country, it may be proper, before proceeding farther in his history, to furnish a description of his personal appearance; for his physical organization was not less remarkable than the qualities of his mind were rare and extraordinary. He was only four feet seven inches in height; his head was large in proportion to his body; the features of his face were remarkable, and boldly delineated, and his countenance was grave and benignant. He was hunch-backed, with a projecting chest, below which his body became much contracted. His legs were so

slender, as to appear almost unequal to the purpose of supporting him, diminutive as his frame was, in comparison with the ordinary size of the human stature. A habit he had contracted, of standing in a twisted position, with one hand resting upon his left hip, added to the effect produced by a large white beard, that for many years had not been shaved, contributed to render his figure perfectly unique. It is singular, that his wife very much resembled him in size, having a crooked back like her husband, and the similarity of their appearance even excited the remarks of the slaves in Barbadoes, who used to say when they saw them together, *"That ittle backararar* man, go all over world, see for that backararar woman for himself."*

On his arrival in Pennsylvania, it was soon discovered that his character was eccentric. The practice of holding slaves was general in the province, though they were

* Name for Europeans or white people.

treated more mildly than their debased countrymen in the West Indies. Lay was, however, established in the pious doctrine that the odious system of slavery was altogether unrighteous, and with the same zeal with which he had begun, he continued to reprobate the conduct of every one who participated in the custom. His independence of opinion, and freedom of expression, rendered him a less welcome emigrant than those who could quietly approve, or openly adopt the habits of the times, and his sentiments met with vigorous opposition from every quarter. Thus this champion of justice, of human rights, and reformation, found himself again an almost solitary combatant in a field where prejudice and avarice, had marshalled their combined forces against him. His disappointment at being thus received in Philadelphia, the very name of which promised tranquillity and repose to his long afflicted heart, gave a new, and as was at first supposed, a misanthropic determination to his mind. His intention, when he left Barbadoes, was to have resided in the city, but he now

resolved to fix his residence in a more retired situation in the country.

Conformably with this plan, he procured a few acres of land, situate between Germantown and the old York road, about six miles north of Philadelphia, and not far distant from the present village of Mileston. On the rural spot of his choice, he built a cottage, resembling, in its construction, a cave, planted a small orchard, and for utility and ornament, cultivated near the front of his humble dwelling several walnut trees, which remain venerable and living monuments of the place of his first habitation in Pennsylvania.

Having completed his house, he removed to it in 1732. He now adopted habits of the most rigid temperance, self-denial, and frugality, which he ever after observed. He drank nothing but water and milk, and subsisted altogether upon vegetable diet. His clothing was entirely composed of tow fabric, of his own spinning, and of the natu-

ral colour. His tender conscience would not permit him to eat any food, nor wear any garment, nor use any article which was procured at the expense of animal life, or that was in the remotest degree, the product of the labour of slaves. Thus purified, by what he conceived to be obligatory and necessary to qualify him for the great duty assigned him, he went forth with fresh animation to disseminate his principles. Excepting the time requisite for procuring food and raiment, he was altogether devoted to the inculcation of his doctrines; and for the promotion of them, he visited several of the governors of the neighbouring provinces, as well as other influential characters, in church and state. He omitted no opportunity to endeavour to interest every one with whom he met in the benevolent work he had undertaken; and to effect this, he adopted various means—some of which were so extravagant as to induce the belief that his intellect was partially diseased. Although he had been disunited from membership with the Society of Friends at an early period of his life,

yet he always avowed their principles, and was attached to them as a religious community; but he could not endure the idea, that professing as they did, it was proper that any of them should hold their fellow beings in bondage; hence, he appears to have directed the most energetic and unceasing assaults upon them; nor could he be persuaded that it must, from the very nature and constitution of the human mind, be a gradual work, if ever they were cleansed as a people from the practice, which, even at that time, some of them, with himself, considered as an offence in the sight of Divine Purity.

The following facts will shew some of the modes he adopted, to convince the Society of Friends, and others, of the impropriety of their conduct in keeping slaves. During the session of an annual meeting, held at Burlington in New Jersey, Lay proceeded to that city. Having previously prepared a sufficient quantity of the juice of poke-berry (Phytolacca decandra) to fill a bladder, he

contrived to conceal it within the cover of a large folio volume, the leaves of which were removed. He then put on a military coat, and belted a small sword by his side; over the whole of this dress he threw his great coat, which was made in the most simple manner, and secured it upon himself with a single button. Thus equipped, he entered the meeting house and placed himself in a conspicuous situation, from which he addressed the audience in substance as follows:*

"Oh all you negro masters who are con-
"tentedly holding your fellow creatures in a
"state of slavery during life, well knowing
"the cruel sufferings those innocent captives
"undergo in their state of bondage, both in
"these North American colonies, and in the
"West India islands; you must know they

* The particulars of this singular transaction, and the speech, were related to Dr. John Watson, deceased, formerly of Bucks County, by his friend and neighbour, the late Jonathan Ingham, Esquire, who was a witness of the scene.

"are not made slaves by any direct law, but "are held by an arbitrary and self-interested "custom, in which you participate. And es- "pecially you who profess '*to do unto all* "*men as ye would they should do unto you*'— "and yet, in direct opposition to every princi- "ple of reason, humanity, and religion, you "are forcibly retaining your fellow men, "from one generation to another, in a state of "unconditional servitude; you might as well "throw off the plain coat as I do"—(here he loosed the button, and the great coat falling behind him, his warlike appearance was exhibited to his astonished audience) and proceeded—"It would be as justifiable in the "sight of the Almighty, who beholds and re- "spects all nations and colours of men with "an equal regard, if you should thrust a sword "through their hearts as I do through this "book." He then drew his sword and pierced the bladder, sprinkling its contents over those who sat near him.

On another occasion, when a deep snow was on the ground, he stationed himself at

a gate way, opening to one of their meeting houses, having his right leg and foot entirely uncovered; as the people went in, several of them reasoned with him for thus exposing himself, and cautioned him against the danger of contracting disease by such conduct. "*Ah* (said Lay,) *you pretend compassion for* "*me, but you do not feel for the poor slaves* "*in your fields, who go all winter half clad.*" For the purpose of enforcing upon the mind of a neighbour of his, with whom he had often remonstrated, a conviction of his guiltiness in keeping a slave, he adopted a plan which evinced his knowledge of human nature. This man had an interesting child, a boy of six years old, whom Lay sometimes met at a distance from the dwelling of his parents; on one of those occasions he succeeded in decoying him to his cave, about one mile distant, within which, by means of some amusement, he contrived to keep him concealed from view. As the evening came on, Lay observed the father and mother running towards his dwelling; as they drew near, discovering their distress, he advanced

and met them, enquiring in a feeling manner, "*what is the matter?*"—the afflicted parents, apprehensive that they should never recover their child, replied with anguish, "Oh Benjamin, Benjamin! our child is gone, he has been missing all day." Lay paused, and said, "*Your child is safe in my house,* "*and you may now conceive of the sorrow you* "*inflict upon the parents of the negroe girl* "*you hold in slavery, for she was torn from* "*them by avarice.*"

In the year 1737, he published a book entitled—"All slave keepers, that keep the in- "nocent in bondage, apostates. Pretending "to lay claim to the pure and holy Christian "religion, of what congregation soever, but "especially in their ministers, by whose ex- "ample the filthy leprosy and apostacy is "spread far and near; it is a notorious sin "which many of the true friends of Christ "and his pure truth, called Quakers, have "been for many years, and still are, concern- "ed to write and bear testimony against; as "a practice so gross and hurtful to religion,

" and destructive to government, beyond " what words can set forth, or can be declared " of by men or angels, and yet lived in by " ministers, and magistrates in America.

" *The leaders of the people cause them to err.*"

" Written for a general service, by him " that truly and sincerely desires the present " and eternal welfare and happiness of all " mankind, all the world over, of all colours, " and nations, as his own soul."

" BENJAMIN LAY."

This work contains many interesting facts, and some powerful appeals to the judgment and feelings. In some parts, however, it manifests the same intolerance of the mistakes of others, which characterises the other productions of the author on the subject of slavery, and which, at the time of this publication, was calculated, by the obstinacy, which it was likely to excite, rather to confirm than remove the error of some of those to whom it was addressed. He distributed

his book gratuitously, particularly among those who were about to succeed the generation which was then passing away; and there can be no doubt that his conscientious efforts made a deep and useful impression upon most persons who perused what he had written, with the attention which it certainly merited. On the last page of this curious production, Lay gives the following critic on his own labours; and the candour, simplicity, and humility with which it is clothed, furnish conclusive evidence of the sincerity and urbanity of his character.

"*Courteous and Friendly Reader,*

"There are some passages in my book, "that are not so well placed as could have "been wished; some errors may have escaped "the press, the printer being much encumb- "ered with other concerns: thou art lovingly "entreated to excuse, amend, or censure it as "thee please: but remember that it was writ- "ten by one that was a poor common sailor, "and an illiterate man.—B. L."

Not long before he removed from his cave, curiosity, associated with respect for him, induced Governor Penn,* Dr. Franklin, and some other gentlemen to make a visit to Lay—he received them in his primitive abode with his usual politeness; after some interesting conversation, the table was spread for dinner, and plentifully covered with vegetables and fruit, of which he thus invited them to partake—"*This is not the kind of fare you have at home, but it is good enough for you or me—and such as it is, you are welcome to eat of it.*"

Having passed the sixty-third year of his age, he began to feel some of the infirmities incident to the decline of life, which, connected with the incessant application of his time to his favourite subject, and the desire that his wife, to whom he was most tenderly attached,† might be relieved from the do-

* Richard Penn, Esq.

† Sarah Lay was an intelligent and pious woman, an approved minister of the gospel in the Society of

mestic cares which she had been long engaged with, influenced him to leave the mansion they had lived in for more than nine years, and remove a few miles, to the farm of John Phipps, near Abington meeting house, in whose family they boarded. Soon after this change of residence, the interesting and endeared connection which had subsisted between this affectionate pair, through the many vicissitudes of their lives, was dissolved by the death of his wife. This event, which involved him in great affliction, was rendered more acute by the circumstance that he had no children, or other relative, to participate in his sorrow—to share his loss—to yield the sympathy which such privation demanded—or afford the consolation and aid that a bereavement so severe required.

Friends: she cordially united with her husband, in his disapprobation of slavery, and contributed all in her power to the support of his mind under the trials which it suffered, in his exertions to promote a change in the public sentiment, respecting the inhumanity and injustice of the custom.

The deprivation he had suffered, and his advanced age might be supposed sufficient to have abated the ardour of his mind, and disqualified him for active exertion. But Lay was no ordinary man. He rose superior to the influence of such causes and resumed his labours of benevolence with augmented assiduity. He continued to publish and circulate essays on the subject of slavery, and sought for occasions, both publicly and privately, to speak of its injustice. For this purpose he attended all places of public worship, without regard to the religious professions of their congregations. On one occasion, he walked into the Oxford church, with a mantle of sack-cloth wrapped round him, and stood attentively listening to the sermon which was preaching. When the services of the morning were over, Lay thus began an address to the congregation. "*I do "not approve of all the minister has said, but "I did not come here to find fault with the "preaching; I came to cry aloud against your "practice of slave-holding.*" In all the places of worship which he thus visited, he used

the same freedom; and his addresses were sometimes so long and vehement as to require his removal from the house; an act to which he always submitted without opposition.

Persons, who were not acquainted with him, often deceived themselves by supposing him to be destitute of common understanding. In company he would often make observations and remarks, calculated to provoke argument, with a view to fathom the minds of those with whom he conversed; and the estimate of their characters was formed with astonishing facility and correctness. His replies were always pointed, and strictly adapted to the nature of the questions proposed; for he instantly discovered whether an inquiry was made with a desire to obtain information, or suggested to gratify mere curiosity, and produce ridicule. He was also scrupulously careful to respect the truth, in all his conversation, and would rebuke those who in the least degree departed from it, by the use of words and phrases, complimenta-

ry or otherwise, which did not proceed from the heart. As he was once walking from his home to Philadelphia, he was met by several persons on horseback, who unwisely expected he would afford them diversion. One of the party stopped him with this salutation—"*Sir, your humble servant*"—Lay looked upon the stranger, and said, "*If thou art my humble servant, clean my shoes.*" Not sufficiently ascertained of his character, by that remark, they tauntingly inquired of him which was the direct route to heaven? Lay promptly replied—"*Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.*" They were then satisfied without further interrogation, and left him, evidently mortified at their impotent efforts to produce idle merriment, by insult upon real virtue.

He always travelled on foot, and made frequent visits in the neighbourhood, as well as at a considerable distance from home; having once walked to Philadelphia, with an intention of conversing with an individual of considerable note, he found the family, on

his arrival, sitting at breakfast; Lay entered the room, and was invited to partake with them, but seeing a black servant in attendance, he inquired of his master *"Is this man a slave?* being answered affirmatively, he said, *"then I will not share with thee the fruits of thy unrighteousness,"* and immediately departed from the house. He never owned a slave himself, neither would he sit with, nor partake of the food of any one who kept them. Notwithstanding the popular antipathy against Lay, he enjoyed the friendship and society of some of the most pious and learned men, who at that time adorned the province of Pennsylvania. The most cordial attachment subsisted between him and the truly honourable Anthony Benezet. He maintained through life, an uninterrupted intercourse with Dr. Franklin, Dr. De Benneville, and many other distinguished characters. He was also intimately acquainted with Ralph Sandiford, who, like himself, was an ardent opposer of slavery, and wrote upon the subject.

Benjamin Lay's mind was not exclusively directed to the subject of the trade in human flesh, and the shocking train of evils by which it was attended; it observed, and investigated other objects connected with the interests of civil society and the welfare of man. His attention was directed to a consideration of the nature and propriety of the then existing punishments, for offences against the criminal laws. The ideas which, within thirty years, have so extensively prevailed on this subject, and which have led to the melioration of the penal code of Pennsylvania, (a code which is now admired and imitated by some of our sister states,* and the adoption of whose principles is about to be attempted by European nations,)† were suggested by

* Since the establishment of the Penitentiary system in Pennsylvania, there have been institutions of like character founded in New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, New Jersey, and Kentucky.

† Sir S. Romily continues indefatigable in his exertions, as a member of the British parliament, to convince the lawgivers of England that a criminal code.

Lay, as long since as the year 1737,—at that time he thus notices the subject: "As to cri- "minals, they had better be kept in bondage, "that by hard labour they might be brought to "repentance and amendment of life, in order "to a happy death, rather than to put them "to death in their sins; for in the grave there

less sanguinary and cruel than that which now exists in that country, would promote the best interests of the realm; whilst a considerable number of distinguished men, in London, have formed themselves into an association in aid of the great work of reformation and mercy. That society, in an account of its origin, &c. not long since published, candidly acknowledges itself indebted to the "*Philadelphia Society for alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons*," for its existence. Some information respecting the successful exertions of the Philadelphia society, in producing a change in the penal laws of Pennsylvania, was printed many years ago, a copy of which being sent to London, it accidentally fell into the hands of a gentleman, whose benevolent mind had been for some time engaged in reflection on the subject of their criminal punishments; the encouragement it afforded induced him to communicate his views to a few of his friends, who immediately formed an association for similar purposes.

"is no repentance. Hard labour and mean liv-
"ing is an antidote to luxury and idleness, and
"captivity the reverse of nature, might prevent
"a great deal of wickedness in the world, and
"bring many unthinking creatures to remem-
"ber and prepare for their latter end, before
"it is to late, which I should rejoice to see."
This judicious, enlightened, and truly chris-
tian sentiment, is of itself an imperishable
evidence of the profound conceptions of his
understanding, and alone sufficient, if there
were no other proof of his desire to promote
the happiness of his fellow creatures, to en-
title him to the respect and gratitude of man-
kind.

With the same enlightened zeal, he point-
ed out the pernicious consequences which
would result from the introduction of foreign
spirits into this country. He declared that
the general use of them would corrupt and
degrade any people, and that there was dan-
ger, if they could be easily and cheaply pro-
cured, of their becoming the habitual beverage
of the inhabitants. He introduces the subject,

in considering the trade which at that day was extensively carried on with the West Indies; and says, "We send away our excellent "provisions and other good things, to pur- "chase such filthy stuff, which tends to the "corruption of mankind, and they send us "some of their worst slaves, when they can- "not rule them themselves, along with their "*rum* to complete the tragedy; that is to "say, to destroy the people in Pennsylva- "nia, and ruin the country."

In fulfilling the purposes of his universal philanthropy, he devoted a portion of his time to visiting schools, and embraced every proper opportunity of impressing the susceptible minds of children with a just and reverent sense of their duties toward God—enforcing the importance of early establishing themselves in habits of order, sobriety, and frugality—inculcating the principles of humanity by simple illustrations, and recommending it to them to be governed through life by the precepts, and to follow the meek and humble example of our holy Redeemer.

The following feeling observation is from the pen of an ancient and worthy gentleman, who in his early youth was a member of one of the schools that Lay frequented; "When the children were reading in the Bible, he would stop them and explain particular passages for their improvement, and although we at that time thought too lightly of Benjamin's anxiety for our welfare, yet some of his labours and admonitions are remembered (by one at least of the scholars,) at the present day, though his advice was imparted more than sixty years ago."

Lay had no compassion for vagrant mendicants; he used frequently to assert that "any "one who is able to go abroad and beg, can "earn four-pence a day, and that is enough to "keep a person above want or dependence in "this country." He was nevertheless charitable toward those who by disease, or misfortune, were reduced to necessitous circumstances, and among the numerous instances of his judicious dispensation of money, the following is worthy of notice. He understood

that a poor woman in the neighbourhood, was in need of relief, and to ascertain the fact, called upon a respectable person whom he supposed to be acquainted with the particulars of her situation. Having thus satisfied himself of the truth of the case, he presented to the person on whom he had called several silver pieces—saying, "*lay this out for her, but dont let it be known where it came from.*"

His fondness for frequent retirement and meditation, continued throughout his life: and for the more complete indulgence and enjoyment of this rational habit, he selected an interesting spot, on the farm of the person with whom he resided, and improved a natural excavation in the earth, near a fine spring of water, so as to afford himself a commodious apartment. The interior part of the roof of his cave was neatly ornamented with festoons of evergreen, and in other respects, the room was conveniently fitted for his purpose. Here was kept his library of books, which amounted to nearly two hun-

dred volumes, comprising some of the works of the best authors in theology, biography, poetry, and history. In that seclusion he reflected, read, and wrote.

After Lay's death the principal part of his manuscripts were preserved by the gentleman with whom he lived, but it is sincerely to be lamented that those relics fell into the hands of the British, during the revolutionary war, who, it is supposed, destroyed them. His books were disposed of at the sale of his effects. Two of these volumes have, after considerable search, been lately discovered. They contain numerous marginal annotations, from which, for want of better sources whence to derive a knowledge of the reflections of this christian philosopher, a few of his most interesting remarks are selected.

In a folio edition of *"Plutarch's Lives,"* London, 1603, are the following notes.—In the account of the Lacedemonian songs and

dances the following couplet, sung by the old men, is quoted—

"We have been young and strong, yet valiant heretofore,
"Till crooked age did hold us back, and bade us do no more."

Lay subjoins—

"But virtue in our breasts is in her prime,
"Which cannot wear away with age or time."

He thus notices the corruption of Sparta in the reign of King Agis—

"Money—the love of money,—the destruction of "nations—the fountain of evil."

On the conduct of Numa Pompilius, when he refused the kingdom, Lay notes—

"O! wise Numa—famous virtue."

Of the measures adopted by Lycurgus for preventing the introduction of foreign wares

and merchandize, deeming them injurious to the Lacedamonians—Lay notes—

"I admire the wisdom of this man."

In an old edition of *Edmundson's Journal*, at the conclusion of one of the chapters in which that author admonishes his readers against the love of riches, Lay notes—

"Mammon—cursed love of mammon—mammon surfeits and corrupts the mind, and darkens the understanding—Oh the blessed doctrine and practice of the first christians, which kept out luxury, pride, and cursed covetousness."

In another part of the same work, he remarks, with appropriate allusion to the subject,

"A selfish spirit, is satan's spirit."

And equally applicable is his annotation on another of the chapters,

"A few things will serve a right mind, for the world's glory hath destroyed many."

His precepts were generally sound, and uniformly supported by the weighty sanction of practice. Whatever he conceived to be his duty, that he performed at every hazard. He persuaded, admonished, and threatened, without fear or flattery.

One of the most extraordinary acts of his life, was the attempt he made, in imitation of the Saviour of mankind, to fast for the term of forty days. Perhaps no christian professor, except himself, ever conceived the fast of our Saviour to be intended as an example for mankind. We must not, however, rashly condemn the conduct of Lay. He certainly acted from a sense of duty; and the voluntary penance to which he subjected himself, is at least a proof of resolute self-denial, and of the power of the human system to sustain itself under a deprivation of its accustomed subsistence. He persisted in his fast for three weeks. For several days after he had commenced it, he continued to pursue his common occupations. He rose at his usual time, which was always at the

dawn of day, took his usual exercise, and made his usual excursions in the neighbourhood. One morning he even walked to Philadelphia, to have an interview with Dr. Franklin, who has often been heard to remark that on that occasion Lay's breath was so acrid as to produce a suffusion of water in his eyes, which was extremely painful. The following memorandum will show what were Lay's feelings at the time it was made: "*25th. of 12th. mo. 1737–8, this being the ninth day of my fasting, having taken nothing but spring water several times a day, and am as well in health, as ever, since I came to Pennsylvania.*" Soon after this his strength began to yield. He was at length unable to leave his chamber, and finally, was confined to his bed. When he could no longer help himself, he directed a large loaf of bread to be placed on a table near to him, and upon this he kept his eyes steadily fixed. He conversed very little, but he often addressed himself in these words: "*Benjamin thou seest it, but thou shalt not eat it.*"

Vain were the solicitations of his friends to induce him to abandon his purpose; his mind was immoveable, notwithstanding all their representations, that if he persisted much longer, he would certainly perish. With the rapid sinking of his system, his mental faculties began to fail. As soon as this was perceived by those around him, they administered suitable diet, and thus he was gradually restored.

During the last one or two years of the close of his life, the infirmities of age disqualified him for much exertion, either of body or mind. He remained principally at home, employed in spinning and other domestic occupations. Honey was one of the few articles of his food, and he amused himself with constructing hives for the accommodation of his bees, and observing their curious labour. By his friendly care to those industrious insects, and by abstaining from the cruel practice of destroying them in order to procure their honey, he increased his original family to a large community,

whose dwellings extended more than a hundred feet in a continued line.

To a person who went to see him in the last year of his life, he offered to secure one hundred pounds, if he would engage, after his death, to burn his body, and throw the ashes into the sea. He assigned no reason for the wish which dictated this singular proposition, and the individual to whom the application was made declining the office, he never after mentioned it. Whether he was led to make this request from his admiration of the character of Lycurgus, who had expressed a similar desire as to the disposal of his body after death, is not known; though the idea probably originated in that source.

Not long before his death, a friend of Lay's made him a visit for the purpose of acquainting him that the religious society of friends, had come to the determination to disown such of their members as could not be persuaded to desist from the practice of holding slaves, or were concerned in the im-

portation of them. The venerable and constant friend and advocate of that oppressed race of men, attentively listened to this heart-cheering intelligence, and after a few moments reflection on what he had heard, he rose from his chair, and in an attitude of devotional reverence, poured forth this pious ejaculation: "*Thanksgiving and "praise be rendered unto the Lord God.*" After a short pause, he added—"*I can now "die in peace.*"

Thus were his feelings sublimed by the solemn conviction of the controling influence of the Deity. To him he considered the acknowledgment due, for this change in the conduct of Friends, and to him was it fervently offered. At this interesing period, Lay's mind also appears to have conceived the prophetic and joyful anticipation, that as he had lived to witness an event which he so ardently desired, and so faithfully laboured to promote, he would now be permitted to close in tranquillity his career on earth. This expectation was soon realised; for a short

time after, being absent from home, he was suddenly taken ill. In consequence of this event, several of his neighbours met for the purpose of devising what could best be done for him in his actual situation. Among these was his friend Joshua Morris, whom Lay observing, several times requested that he might be taken to his house. He was at length conveyed thither. The continued violence of his disease convinced those around him that it would terminate his life, and Lay himself was fully sensible of his danger. He therefore directed his attention to some necessary arrangements with regard to his worldly affairs, and by a verbal will, gave to the Society of Friends at Abington, the sum of forty pounds, to be appropriated to the education of the poor children of that meeting. About two weeks after his attack, he peacefully surrended his life to him who gave it, on the 3d. of the 2d. month (Feb.) 1759, Anno Ætatis 82. During 41 years, 28 of which were passed in Pennsylvania, he had continued his zealous testimony against African slavery.

His remains were interred in Friend's burial ground at Abington; and the inventory of his effects, taken after his decease, exhibited his estate to be worth five hundred and eighteen pounds, twelve shillings and nine pence, all of which was personal property.

The most delicate and difficult part of the office voluntarily undertaken by his biographer, is to form an impartial and generous estimate of the character of Benjamin Lay.

A respectful consideration for the opinions of those whose eye may trace the story of his life, as here delineated, it might be supposed, would teach the propriety of leaving this duty to be performed by the unbiassed exercise of every reader's judgment. This right the author feels no desire to infringe; and he is fully convinced of his utter inability to control the decision of others, by the conclusion he forms; though, he confesses, he would be happy to make on the mind of every individual, a favourable impression concerning the merits of Lay.

He was certainly a man eminently endowed with strong natural abilities; but his intellectual powers were not expanded by an education founded upon the basis of sound and liberal learning, nor was his mind polished and refined by the embellishments of ornamental literature. His knowledge of mankind was extensive, but to the polite accomplishments of the world, he paid little regard. It is not therefore surprizing, that in the support of his favourite opinions, he was obstinate to excess, and toward those who opposed him, ungracious to a proverb. His temper was violent, but it was always excited for mercy's sake, and in behalf of those who dared not assert their own rights. His eccentricity was remarkable, but, in the main, it subserved the purposes of utility. His habits, though singular, were in many respects worthy of imitation. Some will allege, and none can doubt, that he occasionally manifested symptoms of derangement; yet all must acknowledge that "*oppression will "make a wise man mad.*" That he was pious and benevolent, most will admit. That he was

disinterested and generous, few can deny. That his opinions were correct, concerning the great work of reformation of which he was one of the founders, we have the almost universal consent of mankind, in the honourable verdict which civilized nations have pronounced upon the question.

MEMOIRS

OF

RALPH SANDIFORD.

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OF

RALPH SANDIFORD.

RALPH SANDIFORD was born in the town of Liverpool, England, Anno Domini 1693. What was the nature or extent of the education which he received cannot now be ascertained. His parents were members of the Episcopal church, and piously instructed him in the principles of that denomination of christians. It appears, however, that he subsequently adopted the profession of the religious Society of Friends, and at an early period of his life, was received into membership among that people. He came to Pennsylvania when a youth, and resided in Philadelphia. His attention was at this

time directed to commerce, in the prosecution of which he visited many of the West India Islands, and several of the provinces on the American continent. The humane heart of Sandiford soon became impressed with feelings of compassion towards that race of his fellow creatures, whom he had an opportunity of beholding not only subjected to unnatural bondage, but the unoffending victims of the most wanton and cruel personal injury. In addition to its effect in exciting the benevolent feelings of his nature, the sight of so much human misery, led him seriously to inquire into the relative duties and obligations of man, as they are enjoined by religion and reason. The result of his inquiry was delivered in the following sound opinion: "*The holding of negroes "in slavery is inconsistent with the rights of "man, and contrary to the precepts of the Au-"thor of Christianity.*" With this doctrine he began his career in the work of reformation, and in this conviction he closed his benevolent labours, and with them, his earthly pilgrimage.

There are few incidents in the life of Sandiford which it has been in the power of his biographer to detail; and what he has been able to collect concerning the character and pursuits of this excellent man, relates chiefly to the part which he took in the great question of African emancipation.

There are, however, some circumstances, which, before entering on the brief view, which is all that can be promised even of the most important feature of his history, it may be proper at this time to relate.

During the period that he was engaged in the trading voyages before noticed, he was often subjected to extreme suffering, and imminent peril. At one time, he was robbed by pirates, and escaped but with his life. On another occasion, the vessel on board which he was sailing, foundered in a storm. Himself, and the ship's company, embarked in the long boat, and were eight days tossed on the ocean without food; they succeeded however, in making the land to the southward of

the gulf of Florida, and their lives were thus saved. But his sufferings did not here terminate. Having embarked for New York, he was again wrecked, and, at great hazard, reached one of the Bahama Islands. Here he continued several months, and at last found an opportunity of being conveyed to Charleston, South Carolina. Thus reduced to poverty, a "*stranger in a strange land,*" expecting to subsist on the bounty of the charitable, at least for a short time, he was unexpectedly introduced to a person of great wealth and influence in that city, who proposed to engage his services in a commercial enterprize which he had projected, and which would have realized to Sandiford a large sum of money. The following notice of that offer, and the reasons why Sandiford refused it, are given in his own words.

"I had, while in South Carolina, a ser-
"vice presented by one esteemed the richest
"in the province, who would have bestowed
"large gifts on me, which engaged me to ac-
"knowledge his affection, and the openness

"of his heart, yet I could not partake of his
"proffers, his riches proceeding from slaves,
"lest I should have lessened my future hap-
"piness, which I had an eye to in the faith,
"and now in measure witness the end of it,
"which otherwise would have brought me
"into bondage, and made me a debtor and
"an oppressor in the creation, which was so
"contrary to me that nature groaned under
"the sight and sense I had of it, which has-
"tened me to Pennsylvania, where the Lord
"raised me again to substance, which was
"consumed by a fire, where I wonderfully
"escaped the lot of those that were burnt, in
"all which I saw the hand of the Lord, who
"has again raised me to fulness and plenty,
"which I now mention to commemorate his
"providence."

From the time of his first arrival in Pennsylvania, until the year 1729, he was zealously engaged, through all the vicissitudes of his fortune, in promulgating his opinions on the subject of slavery. This he did by a strong exposition of his sentiments, when he sup-

posed they might have the least influence on the minds of those whom he met;—and so deeply was his mind engaged with this important concern, that he sought opportunities of provoking discussion respecting it wherever he went.

In the thirty-sixth year of his age, he resolved to publish a work, for the promotion of his favourite object. It was entitled—*The Mystery of Iniquity, in a brief examination of the Practice of the Times.* When his book came out, a copy of it reached the hand of the chief justice of the province, who threatened him with severe penalties, if he permitted it to be circulated. Disregarding all consequences, Sandiford distributed it gratuitously, wherever he believed it would be of use. He was not only opposed by the high authority just mentioned, but by every one whose interest was assailed, or whose unjustifiable practices were exposed, in the correct, though affecting picture, which he gave of slavery.

This production was an efficient auxiliary in advancing the author's opinion. It was replete with sentiments the most sound, and facts in the highest degree imposing, whilst the judicious selections which it contained, from various authors, in support of his philanthropic doctrines, showed the extent of his research, and the depth of his reflection. The style of his work was plain, but energetic; it exhibited a mind at once fortified by manly firmness, and influenced by christian solicitude and benevolence. He concluded his book, in this solemn and affecting manner:

"Let such behold, and see, if there is any "sorrow to be compared to it; which God is "my witness I would rather have chosen to "have bewailed in the wilderness, were it "his will, than thus have appeared against a "crime so much in request; which promotes "idleness and haughtiness in the rich, and "hinders the poor from bread; which bring "evils in the commonwealth, engaged me for "the welfare of all, to give forth this testi-

"mony, that if possible I may be clear of it,
"and you, before my great Creator, and as you
"will answer it, before his tribunal, let it go
"forth as you may see its service in righteous-
"ness; without striking at any creature, but
"at the evil in all, that the cause may be re-
"moved, and that the creation may be go-
"verned by love; and this practice disowned
"in all mankind, and especially by all that
"name the name of Jesus, that every crea-
"ture under the whole heavens may be deli-
"vered from oppression, as well as,

RALPH SANDIFORD."

For nearly two years after the publication of his address, he was incessantly occupied in combating the objections which were raised against the arguments it contained. His bodily health at length became impaired, and his mental energies were almost prostrated beneath the hostility which was waged against him, in consequence of the decisive stand he had taken against slavery. He therefore determined to retire from the city of Philadelphia.

In the year 1731, he purchased a small farm, situated about nine miles, in a north-easterly direction, from Philadelphia, upon the side of the road leading from that place to the village of Bustleton. Here he had a log house erected, and otherwise improved his little property; and upon this spot he lived in patriarchal simplicity, during the remainder of his innocent and useful life.

Ralph Sandiford was small in stature; his physiognomy is represented to have been characteristic of his mind, strongly marked with intelligence and benignity. He was conscientiously opposed to those habits of luxury which, even in the early times in which he lived, had begun to be indulged in Pennsylvania. His clothing was made in the most simple manner, and was of the natural colour of the material of which it was composed. He was hospitable, and entertained those who visited him with all the liberality that was consistent with his primitive mode of living. He was kind and charitable to the poor, and assisted them, when opportu-

nities presented, with his advice as well as from his purse. Though he had many enemies in consequence of his opposition to slave-keeping, yet it was universally acknowledged that he was an upright and honest man.

The disease which had begun its operation upon his system, previously to his retirement to the country, so far from being subdued, as was expected, by change of situation, gradually increased, and ultimately confined him to his bed, toward the close of the year 1732. Perceiving that there was no prospect of his recovery, he calmly waited the awful moment which would forever terminate his sorrows and his sufferings.

Being possessed of considerable property, and having no wife or children on whom it might devolve, he made a particular disposition of it by a will, which was executed on the 7th. day of the 3d. month (March) 1733.

In order to show what were the feelings of Sandiford at this interesting crisis, some

extracts from that instrument are here inserted.

"Be it remembered that I Ralph Sandi-
"ford, of Lower Dublin, in the County of
"Philadelphia, merchant, being sick in body,
"but of sound mind and memory, (Praised
"be the Lord) do make this my last will and
"testament, in manner following: First, I
"commit my soul into the hands of Almighty
"God my maker, hoping through the merito-
"rious death, and passion of Jesus Christ,
"my only Saviour and Redeemer, to be ever-
"lastingly saved—Also I commit my body
"to the earth, to be therein decently buried
"at the discretion of my executors, herein af-
"ter nominated. And as to what worldly
"effects it hath pleased the Lord to bestow
"upon me, (after my just debts and funeral
"expenses are truly paid and discharged) I
"dispose thereof as followeth:

"First, I give to the meeting of the men
"and women of the People called Quakers,

"at Philadelphia, each ten pounds for the "use of the poor. I also give to the Church "of England, for the use of the poor, ten "pounds. I also give to Joseph Chettam "and his sister Hannah, each a guinea—also "I give to Samuel Harrison of New York, "two guineas. I give my brother James San-"diford my watch—I also give Phœbe "Boyles, Sewell's History." He then proceeds, and gives to Mary Peace, his housekeeper, a life estate in the farm, &c. &c. on which he lived, and to Susanna Morris, his servant, a life estate in another plantation which he owned in Cheltenham; and at their death directs all his landed estate to be sold, and the proceeds remitted to his sisters, or their legal representatives, in England, to be equally divided among them.

He did not long survive this last important act of his life.—He died on the 28th. of the 3d. month, (March) Anno Domini 1733, at the age of forty years.

His body was buried in a field, on his own farm,* near the house where his terrestrial existence was peacefully terminated.

The executors of his will had the grave enclosed with a balustrade fence, and caused a stone† to be placed at the head of it, thus inscribed—

"In Memory of
"Ralph Sandiford
"Son of John Sandiford
"of Liverpool, he Bore
"A Testimony against the
"Negro Trade & Dyed
"y^e^ 28th. of y^e^ 3d. Month
"1733. Aged 40 years.

* This farm is now occupied by S. Griffiths. Part of it is within the precincts of a Hamlet, and some of the proprietors of land there, have proposed designating it by the name of Sandiford. To do so, would certainly be highly creditable to the feelings of those who should thus manifest their respect for the memory of an individual so worthy as Ralph Sandiford.

† The author copied the epitaph from the stone, which was found broken in two pieces, laying near a

Near the place where the body of Sandiford was interred, the remains of his housekeeper and servant, also mingle with their parent dust. For many years after their death, care was taken to preserve all the graves from violation. The property, however, passing into the ownership of persons who entertained less respect for the original proprietor than for the soil which covered his ashes, the fence was removed, and the ground which it had enclosed, was occupied for the purposes of agriculture.

During a visit which was made, some time since, to the person who resides on the farm, in order to collect what information could be there procured concerning Sandiford, the spot where he was buried was pointed out, and it was then suggested, that a tree should be planted, in order to designate the place. If that be done, it will in some measure correspond with the intentions of many respectable inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who, appreciating the

fence, not far from the place where it was originally erected.

services of Sandiford in the cause of humanity, several years ago interested themselves in collecting subscriptions, to be applied to the erection of a wall around his grave. It is to be regretted that a design so honourable to the feelings of those who intended thus to pay a well-deserved tribute of respect to the memory of that excellent man, should have been abandoned, because they did not all agree in the precise mode of executing the work.

But whether neglect or veneration be the lot of the mouldering frame of the pious and enlightened Sandiford, it is a precious consolation to believe, that the great principles which he avowed and advocated, are rising into dominion among mankind in proportion to the rapidly diffusing light of christianity, and promise, like the holy precepts of that religion, to be indestructible and eternal.

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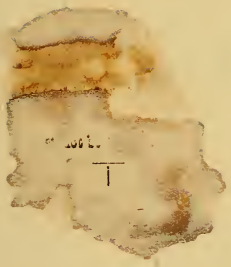

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